

Message

From: Harrington, Jim (DEC) [jim.harrington@dec.ny.gov]
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To: Garbarini, Doug [Garbarini.Doug@epa.gov]
Subject: newsday editorial board

From: Patrick Brewer <Patrick.Brewer@exec.ny.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, March 29, 2016 7:30 PM
To: #BLOGS
Subject: Newsday: State must keep up new pressure to solve Bethpage plume

Newsday: State must keep up new pressure to solve Bethpage plume

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By The Editorial Board

It sometimes seems as if the Northrop Grumman plume moves faster than efforts to stop it and clean it up.

Since the 1950s, the underground toxic mess has been spreading inexorably from the defense manufacturing facility in Bethpage once operated by Grumman Corp. and the U.S. Navy. And the only loud and consistent demands for action in response to this crisis that threatens the water supply for 250,000 people have come from Sen. Chuck Schumer, the Bethpage Water District and, more recently, Assemb. Joseph Saladino (R-Massapequa).

So we welcome the urgency now shown by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, which has ordered Northrop Grumman to shorten a timetable and construct a new well by year's end to treat a particular hot spot of contamination. DEC acting Commissioner Basil Seggos told the firm that if it does not speed up its treatment, the agency will do the work and sue it for reimbursement.

That's a strong call, and Seggos should keep a firm prod on Northrop Grumman. The company has never cooperated fully in the cleanup, and the DEC has not been aggressive enough in response. But the agency's new energy will mean little if it is not sustained, especially given the likelihood of future Northrop Grumman intransigence. The company has repeatedly resisted requests for more testing and for sharing of test results.

Seggos, who took charge of the DEC last fall, seems committed to riding herd on the cleanup. But it's also likely the debacle in Flint, Michigan, where children drank lead-tainted water for months, is playing a role. No state's chief executive, certainly not New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, wants his or her own Flint. Cuomo injected himself into the Bethpage controversy in January — the month Flint exploded into the national consciousness with both Michigan's governor and President Barack Obama declaring states of emergency in that city. Cuomo ordered Northrop Grumman and the Navy to give access to monitoring wells to the state and a water district to conduct their own tests. Cuomo's continued involvement could only help.

The DEC had ample reason to push Northrop Grumman even before the latest test results. Samples from the new hot spot found concentrations of volatile organic chemicals, such as the likely carcinogen TCE, at levels much higher than drinking water standards. And the Bethpage district recently found levels of radioactive radium, a known carcinogen, exceeding safe levels in a well that has been off-line since 2013. Seggos rightly ordered the company to investigate the source of the radium, which involves an examination of its past practices to find out whether the element was used in its manufacturing processes, which seems likely.

The legacy of industrial contamination on Long Island is profoundly sad. The Northrop Grumman plume is only the most egregious of the many plumes threatening the aquifer that supplies our drinking water. And it continues to expand, with new sites of contamination still being discovered. That's infuriating and shameful. If the DEC and Cuomo are ready to take control, that's good. But they have to go all in. Occasional urgency will not get this job done. — The editorial board

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